

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of New Mexico). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MIDDLE-CLASS TAX CUTS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, middle-class families in our country today are paying very close attention to what we are doing here in Washington, DC. They really understand what is at stake. They know the impact our decisions will have on their lives, and they keep hoping their elected officials will finally come together around a budget deal that works for them.

Less than a month ago, we concluded an election season that engaged our Nation in a conversation about this very issue. Candidates for the Presidency and for the Senate on down all laid out their positions on some of the key questions we are now hoping to answer. Should the middle-class tax cuts be extended? Should the Bush tax cuts on the rich end? Should we end the Medicare guarantee for our seniors and the next generation?

Well, those big questions were discussed, argued, and clear positions were taken, and voters went to polling places on election day to render their verdict. The outcome was clear. Candidates who stood for the middle class won. Candidates who advocated for our seniors came out ahead. And in exit polls across the country, voters made very clear that they strongly supported the idea that the wealthy should pay higher tax rates and their fair share.

And everyone—Democrat, Republican, Independent; wealthy, low income, middle class; students, workers, retirees; older, younger, and in between—everyone supports extending the tax cuts for the middle class. Nobody thinks the taxes should go up for 98 percent of our workers and 97 percent of our small business owners.

This ought to be easy. The American people just weighed in supporting a continuation of the Bush tax cuts for the middle class. It is a policy Democrats and Republicans agree on, and it would cushion millions of middle-class families across the country from a significant portion of the upcoming so-called fiscal cliff.

So why isn't it already in law? Why aren't middle-class families already able to feel confident in their taxes not going up? Well, for one reason, and one reason alone. House Republicans continue to hold the middle class hostage in a desperate and deeply misguided attempt to buck the will of the people, ignore the results of this election, and protect the wealthiest Americans from paying their fair share. That is all there is to it.

If Republicans truly cared about keeping taxes low for the middle class, they can do it right now. The Senate passed a bill that would extend the tax cuts for 98 percent of families and 97

percent of workers. President Obama said he would sign it into law. He even showed us the pen. All the House has to do is let this bill come up for a vote and pass it and middle-class families can go into these holidays with the certainty they deserve.

I want to be very clear about something because some of my Republican colleagues seem intent on confusing the issue. Republicans do not have to support taxes going up on the rich in order to vote for our bill to keep taxes low on the middle class. Let me repeat that. Republicans can believe that the Bush tax cuts for the rich should be extended, they can remain committed to fighting for that misguided policy, in my opinion, and they can still vote on the portion of the tax cuts we all agree should be extended for the middle class. Then middle-class families would win, we would have worked together to extend tax cuts for 98 percent of workers and 97 percent of small business owners. Then when the middle class is taken care of, I would be happy to engage my Republican colleagues in a debate about extending the Bush tax cuts for the top 2 percent.

But the first step, the most obvious step, is for the Republican House to take the 98 percent both sides agree on, pass our Senate bill, and send it to the President for his signature.

Recently there have been some cracks in the Republican rhetorical armor that has held fast against compromise for years. More and more Republicans have begun to accept in their rhetoric what Democrats—and, frankly, every bipartisan group that has examined this issue—have known all along: A deficit deal is going to have to be balanced. It is going to have to include new revenue from the wealthiest Americans.

Grover Norquist calls these “impure thoughts,” but to most Americans it is common sense. Now the onus is on Republicans—and especially their leadership—to follow this encouraging rhetoric with some action. So far that has been lacking.

The lengths to which Republicans are now going in order to protect the rich from paying higher rates would be comical if it were not so detrimental. They say they have accepted that revenue needs to be on the table, but then the proposal that Speaker BOEHNER made to the President would actually cut rates for the rich. It lacks any details about where that claimed revenue would come from. And just as independent analysts confirmed about the Ryan plan, and just as we saw in the Romney plan, when you are talking about simply closing loopholes and ending deductions, either the math does not add up or the middle class ends up bearing the entire burden.

Republicans are tying themselves in knots to avoid the obvious: The easiest way to raise revenue from the wealthiest Americans is simply to allow the Bush tax cuts for the top 2 percent to expire as scheduled. That is what the

Democrats want, it is what the American people support, and it would move us a long way toward the balanced and bipartisan deal we are all working to get to.

My colleague in the House of Representatives, Minority Leader PELOSI, is circulating a discharge petition to bring the Senate bill to the House floor. I strongly support this move, and I urge House Republicans to sign on and allow this legislation to come to the floor for a vote.

Democrats have proven we are willing to make the tough compromises that a balanced and bipartisan deal will require. And we have been very clear we will not allow Republicans to push through a bad deal that forces seniors and the middle class to bear this burden all alone.

I am hopeful Speaker BOEHNER and House Republicans will decide to stop holding the middle class hostage, allow the Senate bill to come to the floor, put it up for a vote, and give our middle-class families the tax cuts on which we all agree.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MALI

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise today to address a challenging situation in Mali. Mali is a west African country, a country of nearly ½ million square miles, a vast country that stretches from the Sahara Desert to the Niger River area and is home to roughly 15 million people. Yet it is not at the top of the list of concerns for many Americans.

This spring, back in March, a rogue element in Mali's security forces launched a coup and forcefully overthrew a longstanding, democratically elected government in the nation of Mali, our ally. This may seem inconsequential to the average American, but it could have big implications for our security, as well that of our regional and global allies, because in the power vacuum created in that spring coup, al-Qaida saw an opportunity, and they stepped in. Three different extremist groups, all linked to or controlled by al-Qaida in the Islamic Mahgreb, or AQIM, now control an area the size of Texas in the northern part of Mali. They succeeded in fracturing a formerly stable democracy and contributing to broad security, political, and humanitarian crises that I believe have grave implications for the Sahel region and for America's interests. To put it simply, this matters.

Mali, a relatively strong democracy for more than two decades and an ally

to the United States, is now embroiled in turmoil. The United States, in partnership with the international community, must show leadership in helping it rebuild its democracy and restore its territorial integrity by reclaiming northern Mali from terrorists and extremists. So this morning, as the chair of the African Affairs Subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee, I chaired a hearing to assess the developments and the path forward for U.S. policy in Mali.

What I heard from our experts, from the Department of Defense, from the State Department, from the USAID, as well as a range of outside experts and one witness who testified from Bamako, the capital of Mali, was of real concern to me.

Northern Mali today is the largest terrorist-controlled area in the world. In the north, extremists have imposed a harsh and strict version of Sharia or Islamic law and committed gross violations of human rights. Many folks have heard of Timbuktu but don't know that it is an ancient city in northern Mali, a site where these Islamic extremists have behaved much as the Taliban did in Afghanistan before 9/11. They destroyed sacred religious and historic artifacts in Timbuktu, imposing a harsh version of Sharia that has meant amputations, stonings, violations of women's rights of free speech, religious exercise of rights, fundamentally changing the tolerance and exclusive history of Mali.

This created a humanitarian crisis as more than 400,000 Malians have fled, either internally displaced within Mali or going into neighboring countries as refugees.

With growing ties between these terrorists and Nigeria, Libya, and throughout the region, AQIM, we believe, may now use its safe haven in northern Mali to plan for regional or transnational terrorist attacks. Just as we should not have ignored developments in Afghanistan, which seemed a remote and troubled country when the Taliban took it over more than a dozen years ago, so too we would ignore the chaos in northern Mali at our peril.

In fact, Secretary Clinton has said that Mali has now become a powder keg of potential instability in the region and beyond. The top American military commander in Africa, GEN Carter Ham, said publicly just this week that al-Qaida is operating terrorist camps in northern Mali and is providing arms, explosives, and financing to other terrorist groups in the region. So I believe it is critical that the United States has a strong and comprehensive policy to deal with this threat.

I am concerned that the current U.S. approach may not be forward leaning enough to address all three crises—security, political, and humanitarian—in a coordinated, comprehensive, and effective way at the same time. Given the compelling U.S. interest in stability, security, and good governance

in Mali, we must ensure that we don't miss the bigger picture of what this situation means for the future of Mali, to our allies, and to our security.

The U.N. Security Council is now considering what they call a concept of operations for an African-led military operation. The United States can and should play a more active role in supporting this and preventing the country from becoming a permanent home for extremists and a safe haven for terrorists.

An active role does not mean putting American boots on the ground. Instead, we can provide operational support for a regionally led, multilateral, African-led force being organized by ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States, and the African Union. In the weeks ahead the U.N. Security Council will likely vote on a resolution authorizing this coalition to lead a military intervention to dislodge the terrorists in the north. We have seen models like this work in Cote d'Ivoire and Somalia, so there is reason to believe in the potential of a regional military solution to the security crisis in the north.

However, even if this intervention works, it will take time to train, equip, and assemble the regional force and to develop the appropriate plans for what happens during and after a military intervention. Frankly, Mr. President, security and stability can't be restored to Mali with military action alone. The current crisis is as much about governance as it is about security. A stronger Malian democracy is the best way to ensure security and societal gains in the short term and the long term, but democracy doesn't just begin or end with an election.

One of the reasons Mali's democracy crumbled so quickly was that Malians didn't feel connected to, represented, or well served by their government. Voter turnout in the last few elections was lower and lower, with the government viewed as corrupt, social services not benefiting the relatively sparsely populated north, and institutions nationwide that were weak.

The political and security challenges in Mali are two sides of the same coin; they are not separate issues. I will urge that we break down silos between departments and agencies in our government and take a comprehensive view.

If we focus on the political only and insist on Mali moving forward briskly with an election even when the security situation will prevent most northern Malians from meaningfully participating, I think we risk unintentionally strengthening the hands of those who want to ensure that Mali's regional divide is permanent and hand a symbolic victory to al-Qaida.

On the other hand, if we rush forward with a security solution, with a regional military intervention before it is adequately planned, before they are responsibly trained and equipped, we risk defeat on that front as well.

I think we can and should do better. We can work closely with our allies,

with regional partners in the international community to address all the security, political, and humanitarian crises unfolding in Mali. Effective, inclusive elections early next year should be one goal but not the only one. We also have to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis of the 400,000 displaced persons and refugees, the more than 4.5 million people in need of emergency food aid in the region, and the security crisis of terrorists controlling an area this large.

To bring long-term peace and stability to Mali and to ensure northern Mali doesn't slide into being the base of operations for the next al-Qaida attack on our allies, our interests abroad, or even the United States, we can't afford to ignore any of the pieces of this complex puzzle. The United States simply cannot afford, despite the many distractions and other priorities facing us, to ignore Mali.

I pledge to work in close partnership with my colleagues in the Senate and with my friends on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to ensure an effective engagement by the United States in this important area.

I yield the floor.

EXTENSION OF MORNING HOUR

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent morning business be extended until 2 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, last week I came to the floor and spoke about our Nation's military and intelligence leaders acknowledging, along with our Nation's scientific leaders, the clear evidence that carbon pollution is changing our climate. Unfortunately, there continues to be some confusion among many Americans regarding the clear scientific consensus, but that is confusion caused by coordinated and deliberate attempts to mislead the American people.

For more than two decades now, the climate denial movement has been well-organized and funded by the fossil fuel industry and conservative ideologues and foundations. The mission of these paid-for deniers is to "manufacture uncertainty," to manufacture doubt so the polluters can keep on polluting.

This isn't a new strategy. We have seen self-serving strategies such as this before. These strategies questioned the merits of requiring seat belts in cars. They questioned CFCs causing deterioration of the ozone layer. They questioned the toxic effects of lead exposure for children. They questioned whether tobacco was really bad for people—the same strategy to manufacture